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Hate Was Alive and Well in Massachusetts Before the Marathon Bombing

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Writer and LGBT advocate

In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings, we can learn several lessons. The one lesson no one should have to be taught is that violence is never justified, that regardless of the reason, harming others is immoral, illegal and just plain wrong.

We also learned that our initial thinking that terrorist groups that have become household names over the past decade, like Al-Qaeda, were not in fact responsible for this heinous act at the Boston Marathon. The suspects in the devastating act of violence that killed three innocent people and maimed and injured dozens of others were in fact two brothers, both young and raised right here in our own backyard in the United States of America.

In fact, many of the most infamous violent attacks have been acts committed by individuals, not by groups. Think the Oklahoma City bombing, the first World Trade Center attack, the underwear bomber who was thwarted, and the countless campus and school shootings that have claimed the lives of many. All of these acts were plotted, planned and carried out by individuals, not by well-funded, politicized groups.

“Most hate crimes are perpetuated by youngsters who operate alone,” said Jack Levin, Ph.D., a professor at the Irving and Betty Brudnick school of Sociology and Criminology at Northeastern University in the documentary *Puzzles: When Hate Came to Town*,

which is now making its way through the country via screenings.

When 18-year-old Jacob Robida walked into a gay bar in New Bedford, Mass., with a gun and a hatchet, he acted alone. Several LGBT patrons were seriously injured by the violent acts of an angry, homophobic, sorely misguided teenager, in addition to the deaths of a police officer and a female companion, after which Robida took his own, young life.

Though the homophobic act took place in 2006, the story is just starting to get told now through the documentary *Puzzles: When Hate Came to Town*, and it resonates strongly in light of the recent rash of anti-LGBT hate crimes.

Filmmaker Tami Gold wrote in an email to me:

LGBT people today are far more likely than any other minority group in the United States to be victimized by violent hate crimes. Many believe this is a backlash related to recently won LGBT rights, not just marriage but workplace protection. As the economic crisis impacts working-class youth and civil rights for LGBT and other minority groups are won, defensive rage has been known to increase. It is in just such situations — when long-held societal notions about blacks, Latinos, Jews, LGBT people or other minorities are shifting — that violent backlashes often set in.

The documentary, produced by filmmaker and educator Tami Gold and David Pavlosky, takes an insider's view of the otherwise unassuming town of New Bedford, Mass., a place that eerily parallels Watertown, where Boston bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was found wounded in a boat. The young man is not dissimilar from the protagonist of the dystopian documentary, Jake Robida.

Filmmaker David Pavlosky wrote in an email to me:

*Two drastically different worlds collide in *Puzzles*, the story of a Neo-Nazi hate crime offender and his victims in one small American city. *Puzzles* explores the correlation between American economic desperation and homophobia, intolerance, and, ultimately, violence. The film allows the viewer to feel first-hand the fear and anxiety that these crimes create while*

honestly facing the deeply human emotions that cause them. But Puzzles also shows that even the most horrendous crime can be a catalyst for a community to change, grow, and deeply connect.

The film takes the viewer through the painful events that took place in the working-class town and the existing divide between the LGBT community and the disenfranchised teenagers of the community.

Even though they were directed at different groups, both crimes — the Boston Marathon bombing and the hate crime in *Puzzles* bar — are rooted in the same paradigm: young, disenfranchised men who lean on hate and violence as outlets. If only these young people had been guided toward the light with proper support, education and perhaps medical intervention, we might have so much blood on our hands.

Check out the Puzzles trailer below, and learn more about the film and other important work by Tami Gold [here](#):



CORRECTION: An earlier version of this post misidentified Jacob Robida as Jack Robida.

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